

Ujjwala Raut on Pioneering Indian Representation on Global Runways

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As Indian models increasingly take prominent spots on major international fashion runways, veteran supermodel **Ujjwala Raut** reflects on how representation has evolved — and why visibility alone isn't enough for true inclusion. Her insights arrive amid a new generation of Indian talent making waves abroad, underscoring both progress and the road ahead.

Trailblazers Open Doors

The story of Indian representation on global fashion stages is rooted in the journeys of trailblazers like **Ujjwala Raut**, who first walked for legendary houses such as **Hermès and Yves Saint Laurent** in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Her early career — beginning with major runway shows in Paris — helped establish Indian beauty and presence in an industry long dominated by Western ideals.

She recounts how breaking into that world wasn't simple. Models of her generation were often greeted with unfamiliar systems and expectations, but their persistence helped create opportunities for future talents. Raut's breakthrough came after winning modelling contests as a teenager and proving her skill on global platforms.

The Next Generation Rises

Today, Indian faces are more visible on haute couture and ready-to-wear runways worldwide. A landmark moment came when **Bhavitha Mandava** became the **first Indian model to open Chanel's Métiers d'Art 2025–26 show** — staged at the very New York subway where she was discovered. Her ascent showcases how global fashion scouting is increasingly open to diverse talent.

Models like Mandava now walk for prestigious brands such as **Bottega Veneta, Dior and Courrèges**, though Raut stresses that representation must deepen beyond occasional spots to meaningful roles in brand campaigns and creative narratives.

Vision Beyond Visibility

Raut emphasises that while Indian models have gained *visibility*, the focus should expand to *voice* — where models are recognised as individual personalities, storytellers and ambassadors of culture, not just figures on a runway. Her view reflects a broader industry discourse about authentic representation in fashion.

She also points to how the fashion week circuit's modern evolution — with celebrity culture often overshadowing buyer-centric shows — requires careful attention to ensure meaningful opportunities for models.

A Legacy of Influence

Ujjwala Raut's pioneering career helped lay the foundation for Indian models today. Icons like Radhika Nair, Lakshmi Menon and newer faces continue that evolution, proving that Indian talent can thrive at the highest levels of international fashion.

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